

**SOUTH PASADENA LOCAL HISTORY  
SOUTH PASADENA PUBLIC LIBRARY MATERIALS  
SUBJECT: MERIDIAN IRON WORKS**

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VERTICAL FILE



LOU MACK / Los Angeles Times

### *A Little Corner of History in South Pasadena*

Armand Grottolo, who with his wife Edna, has operated the Meridian Iron Works in South Pasadena for 15 years, said it has withstood storms and earthquakes. The owner of the building at 913 Meridian Ave., Raymond Mowrer of Perris, has offered to sell it to the city as an historic site. The structure, built in the 1890s, has been a grocery store and a hotel. It stands in area that was the South Pasadena business center around the turn of the century.

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LA Times 10/18/81

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Los Angeles Times  
June 10, 1982

South Pasadena History Vertical File

L.A. TIMES 6/10/82  
\$125,000 Loaned for Purchase

# Iron Works Site Saved by County

By MARY BARBER, Times Staff Writer

SOUTH PASADENA—The Meridian Iron Works, a quaint old building in the city's historic center, has been saved for posterity by the County Board of Supervisors.

The city wanted it, but didn't have the money. The owners, Raymond and Flora Mowrer of Perris, wanted to sell it and said they couldn't wait. And other buyers, sensing the values of the building's charm and proximity to a thriving commercial area, were closing in, city spokesmen said.

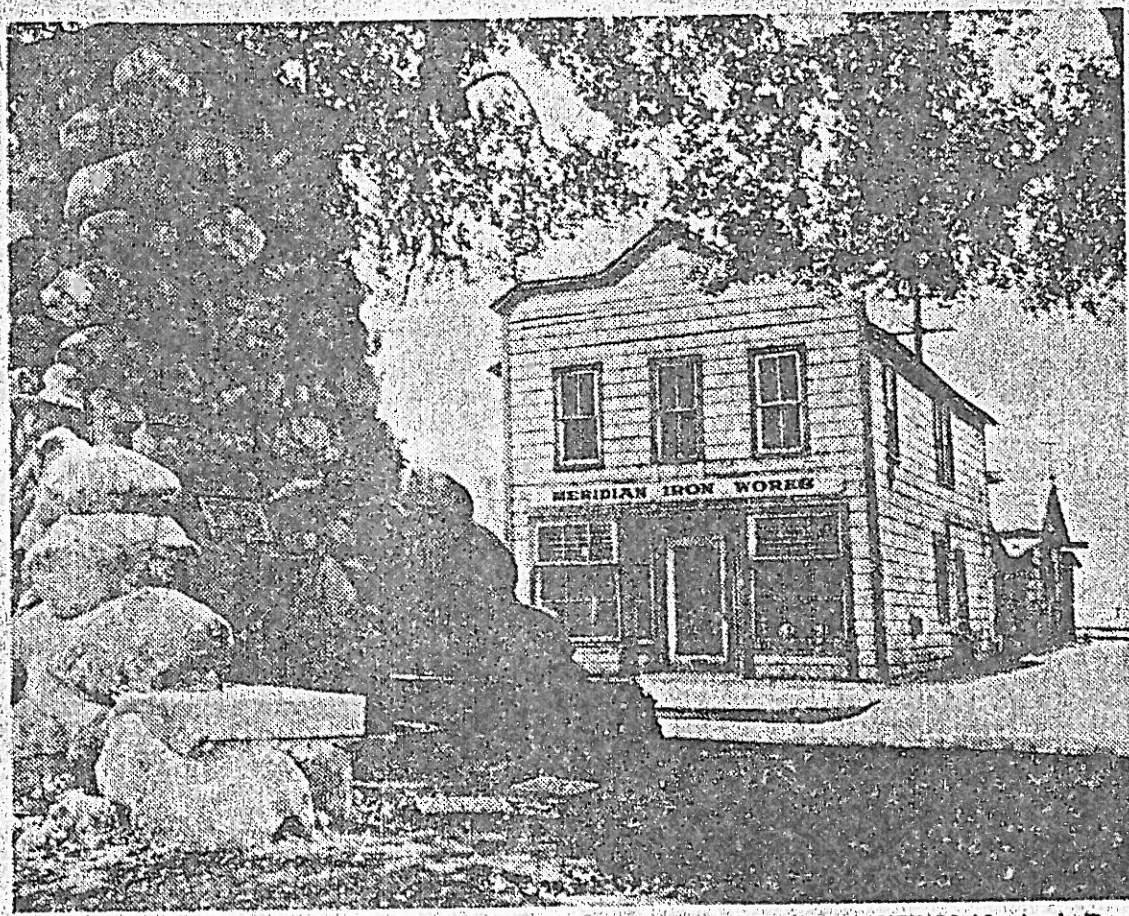
So supervisors this week contributed \$125,000 for the city's purchase of the site, the money to be repaid when South Pasadena gets Housing and Urban Development funding earmarked for the purchase and rehabilitation of landmarks.

Without the country loan, the city faced the prospect of losing the structure and site to a private buyer and the possible demolition of the building.

HUD's approval of the project is contingent on the site being designated as a historical site. The city has applied for such status on the National Register of Historic Places through the State Historical Preservation Office.

Under the loan agreement, South Pasadena will repay

Please see IRON WORKS, Page 5



County Board of Supervisors has lent South Pasadena \$125,000 to save Meridian Iron Works.  
AL MARKADO / Los Angeles Times  
South Pasadena Public Library OCT 1982

## IRON WORKS: Saved

Continued from First Page

the county within 36 months from future block grant funds awarded the city.

Meanwhile, the city has set aside about \$37,000 for improvements.

The total of \$162,413 will buy and rehabilitate a 70-year-old, two-story, 2,300-square-foot building that tilts noticeably and has not been designated for any special purpose.

The purchase was recommended by South Pasadena's Cultural Heritage Committee because of Iron Works' architectural style and location. Of simple late Victorian design, it faces a stone watering trough where horses were once tied in front of the town's railroad depot. Its site at 911 Meridian Ave. is near the public library that was built with Andrew Carnegie (the steel magnate) money. Also nearby is the headquarters for South Pasadena Unified School District and a site the City Council recently purchased for a civic center.

John Bernardi, assistant city manager, said the building is believed to have once served as a jail. For several decades, it was an iron foundry and in recent months became a furniture store.



# Meridian Iron Works building to become historical museum

By Michael Molinski

Since 1888 the Meridian Iron Works building has watched South Pasadena grow. As the city's oldest commercial building, it has seen community residents drive by in horse-and-buggies, Stanley Steamers, Edsels, and DeLoreans. It has witnessed children playing in long dresses and knickers, miniskirts, and Calvin Kleins.

Now, with the help of federal funds, the building will be getting a new face and a new use—as an historical museum. After more than a year of planning, and a recent default from a construction contractor, the city says it has found an appropriate firm to do the needed renovations. B. Marrs Construction Co. recently signed a \$97,700 contract with the city.

**"WE HOPE TO HAVE** the museum open by next spring," said Laura Hudson, a member of the city's cultural heritage committee and one of the driving forces behind the project.

The building rests at 916 Meridian Ave., the original center of the city. "It is one of the oldest structures in the area still standing," said Hudson. "It's pretty much in its original state." And that is how the

committee wants it to stay. The planned renovations will retain the basic structure and appearance of the building.

Although commonly known as the Meridian Iron Works, the building has served as home to several other businesses during its long history. The exact date of construction is unknown, but historians estimate the building date as 1888, the year South Pasadena was founded. The building was originally a stage depot that served area residents and picked up passengers from the nearby train station. It has also been a restaurant, general store, boarding house, meat market, church, and antique store.

**IN FRONT OF THE** iron works, in the middle of the street, a water trough for horses still stands. To the rear of the building is a tin-covered structure where most of the blacksmith work was done.

The barn-like building is an example of Victorian commercial architecture, said William Wietsma, an architect and member of the cultural heritage committee. It was built on a redwood foundation that has long since rotted away.

Wietsma said the building will have to be jacked up while a new cement foundation is poured and new supporting walls built. The siding will be refinished, and



Laura Hudson, Bill Wietsma, and the Meridian Iron Works

the frame will be strengthened.

The museum will have an exhibit room, a limited-access historical library, and office space for the South Pasadena Preservation Foundation, a non-profit organization that will run the museum. Hudson said the South Pasadena City Council, especially Ted Shaw and Lee Prentiss, deserve much of the credit for the project.

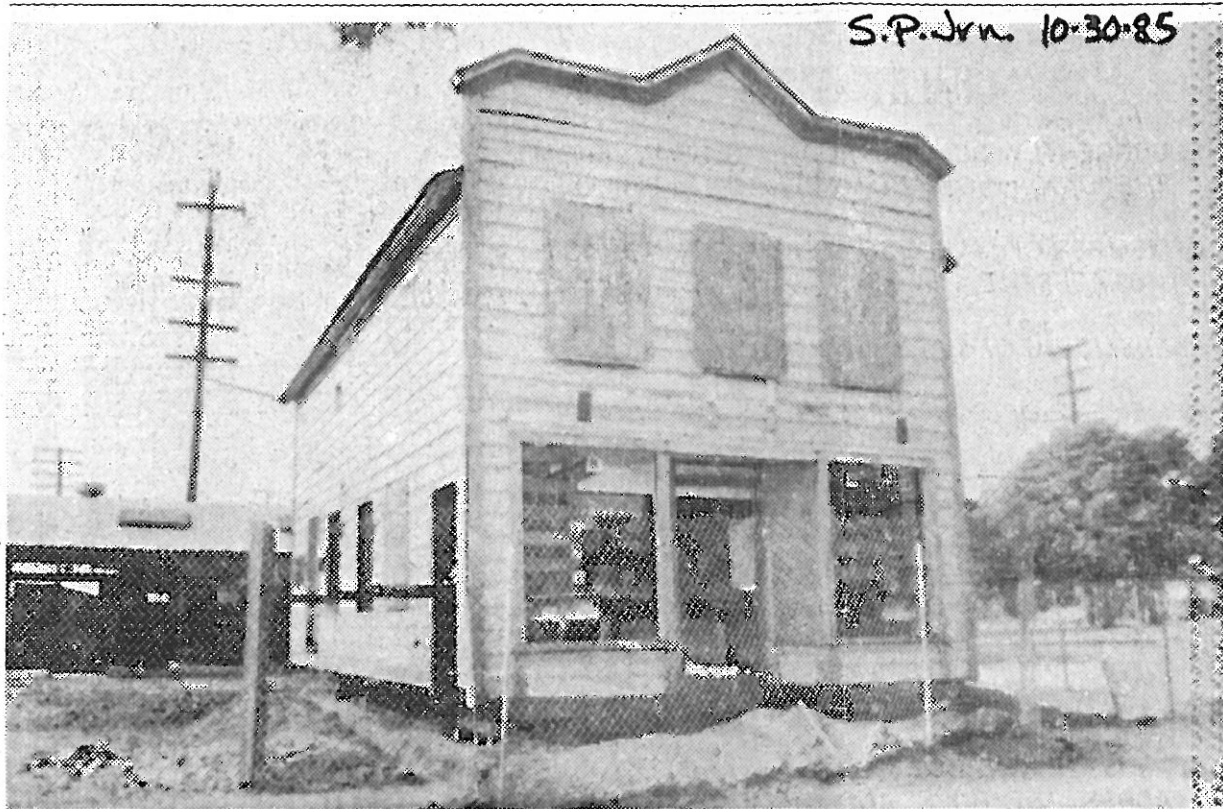
**MUSEUM EXHIBITS HAVE NOT** been planned yet, Hudson said. "We have a lot

of stuff, but there is not much in the way of a unifying theme."

"There are a lot of old-time residents in South Pasadena who save things in their garages that can be contributed to the museum," Wietsma said.

The city hopes the museum will, in addition to being a source of pride and memory for South Pasadenans, serve as a visitors' center and play a part in the city's centennial celebrations three years from now.

Item 5  
Photos by Ted Soqui



**READY TO RENOVATE**— The Meridian Iron Works building sits on stilts while workers prepare its foundation. The full renovation of the building and site is expected to be completed in approximately 90 days.

## Renovation of 'Iron Works' begun

The renovation and rehabilitation of the historic Meridian Iron Works building on Meridian near Mission Street has begun and is expected to be completed in 90 days, according to City Manager John Bernardi.

Work on the foundation of the building, which is now on stilts,

began last week. Work on the building is being done by architect Bob Tryon of Tryon and Tryon and the B. Marrs Construction Co.

The renovation is being funded by Housing and Community Development Block Grants, and will cost an estimated \$98,000.

When the work is completed, the structure will meet all building codes and be safe for people to visit, according to Bernardi.

Bernardi said the South Pasadena Preservation Foundation may have plans to run the newly renovated building as a museum.

South Pasadena Public Library

FEB 20 1986

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# Historic Building's Walls—and Luck—Hold Up

By MARY BARBER, *Times Staff Writer*

About 100 years ago, someone began building a flimsy little store by laying boards on the ground near a railroad stop midway between Los Angeles and Pasadena.

The single-board walls that rose from this mudsill gradually listed and wobbled as the wood foundation rotted.

The building that is now known as the Meridian Iron Works clearly was not built to last 100 years. That it still stands on the same spot is a testimonial to luck, the South Pasadena Cultural Heritage Commission, the city and lots of money.

Luck started in the very beginning when the unknown builder used sturdy redwood and fashioned the storefront in a quaint, classic Victorian design. Ensuing occupants first installed horizontal, then vertical siding that strengthened the building's skimpy walls.

Historic preservationists consider it lucky, too, that much of South Pasadena's original business district is still intact and the object of strong civic pride. The district, centered at Mission Street and Meridian Avenue and covering several blocks, is on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Meridian Iron Works is the oldest building in the district and was designated a historic landmark in 1972. When its owners wanted to sell it in 1982, the city borrowed \$125,000 from Los Angeles County to buy it. City historian Margaret Fay praises the South Pasadena Cultural Heritage Commission for insisting that the building be saved and renovated and for pursuing federal grants.

The Meridian Iron Works is in the proposed path of the Long Beach Freeway

through South Pasadena, but City Manager John Bernardi said this was not an issue with the Department of Housing and Urban Development when it awarded the federal grants.

The Meridian Route, opposed by South Pasadena residents for more than 20 years but approved by the California Department of Transportation in 1984, slices through the historic business district. However, a variation suggested by Caltrans this April places the route two blocks west of Meridian Avenue, avoiding many of the old buildings, including the Iron Works.

Bernardi figures that about \$210,000 in grant money has been poured into the small building. The city paid off the loan from the county and paid architect Robert Tryon about \$12,000 for directing the restoration. The rest of the money went into construction costs.

"Our primary concern was to keep it from falling over," Tryon said. "We jacked it up, removed the interior siding, built conventional stud walls, then lowered it onto a concrete foundation and rewalled the interior siding."

"We held our breath and hoped it wouldn't collapse," Bernardi said. "All we could do was hope and pray. You couldn't put a bowling ball in it and not have it roll to one corner or another."

During the renovation process, layers of wallpaper were stripped off to reveal old newspapers, including a page of the Los Angeles Daily Herald dated 1886.

From such discoveries and from old photos and records, Fay has been able to put together a somewhat spotty history of the building.

In 1905, the Women's Improvement

Assn. paid for construction of the stone watering trough that forms an island in front of the building on Meridian Avenue, she said. Railroad tracks that once ran in front of the building were rerouted behind it, and the Santa Fe Railroad built a station beside it.

Tryon, whose home and architectural firm are in South Pasadena, said that the building's original color was white. He said that it has served as a restaurant and a church, and the words "meat market" were found painted on one side.

"I've been told that when it was first a store, upstairs there were fancy ladies who hung out of the windows when the trains came in," Fay said.

The building may also have been a jail, Bernardi said.

In the 1940s it was a bicycle shop, Fay said, and later the building's owners, Raymond and Flora Mowrer, leased it to the Meridian Iron Works, which used it as a foundry and painted its name across the front.

Eventually, the city bought the structure and, after an investment of more than \$200,000, found it had a public building with no designated purpose.

"That created something of a problem for me," said architect Tryon. "My instructions were to just keep it from falling down. I didn't know what I was designing it for."

"Well, we did wonder a little about what to do with it," Bernardi said.

And then came another stroke of luck. The South Pasadena Preservation Foundation offered to turn it into a local museum and to staff it with volunteers.

"Perfect," Fay said.

HW 2, copy 2



# Evolution of the Meridian Iron Works Museum

By SOCORRO SAUCILLO

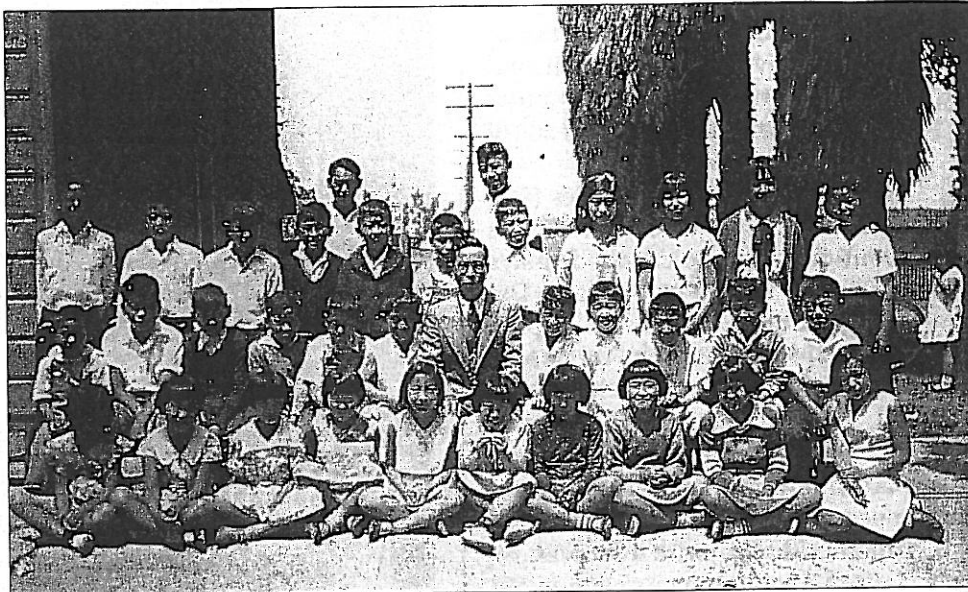
The Meridian Iron Works building was constructed in South Pasadena in 1890. At that time, the redwood frame building from the late Victorian Era was located in the center of the business district of the two year old city. The Santa Fe Railroad station was right next door and there would be no better location for Aaron F. McReynolds to start his grocery store and double as a ticket agent and telegrapher.

Today the Meridian Iron Works Museum is an institution devoted to the procurement, care and display of local objects of lasting interest and value. The museum and the items and photographs housed in the museum are like a time machine which shows how things looked and were used in the past. The artifacts and this building have played an important part in the history of the people who lived in South Pasadena.

The museum, through time, has had many occupants: a bicycle shop; a church; a boarding house; and a Red Cross Center. As docents we have an opportunity to meet people who remember South Pasadena and the museum in previous years and we are attempting to fill in the missing timeline of the Meridian Iron Works Museum.

In 1929, the building was the South Pasadena Nihon Go Gakuen, which in Japanese means Japanese Language School. It was started so American children of Japanese descent could retain their culture and language.

Reverend Nozaki, a Buddhist priest, was the instructor who taught the class. The children would begin their instruction at age 7 and were required to attend classes every Saturday for six hours during the fall. Two months of their summer vacation were spent attending classes from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday



Members of the Japanese Language School outside the current Meridian Iron Works Museum. Classes continued in the late '20s and '30s.



Aaron F. McReynolds, owner of the first grocery store which occupied the current Meridian Iron Works Museum, was also the railroad ticket agent and telegrapher.

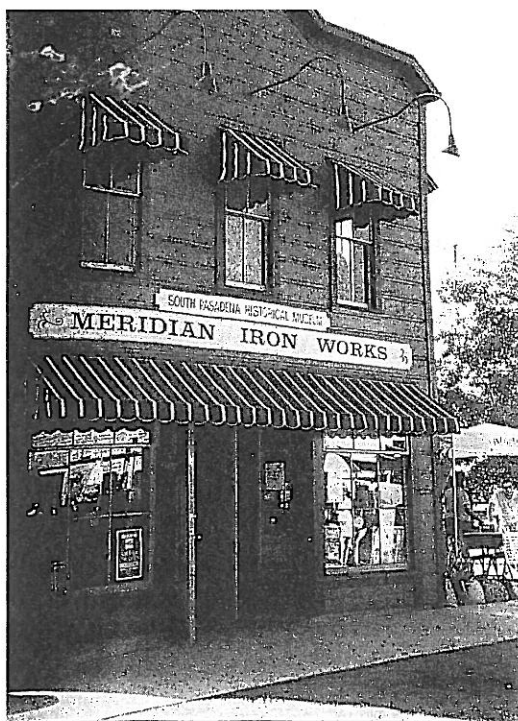
through Friday.

One such student was William Sato, who was one of 35 students who attended the one room school-house. He and his parents moved from Carlsbad, California to South Pasadena in 1924, where his parents had a flower shop and nursery at 628 Fair Oaks Avenue.

Life was tranquil for him until

Sunday, December 7, 1941. William was in his junior year at UCLA studying for a physics exam. His goal was to become a doctor, but all that changed when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor.

Within one week, martial law was declared on all Americans of Japanese descent. The curfew was from 5 p.m. to dawn and they could



A recent view of the museum.

not travel more than five miles from their home. William was asked to leave UCLA and a short time later notices were posted throughout the city that those of Japanese descent were to report to Mission Street and Fair Oaks Avenue with only the belongings they could carry.

William and his sweetheart were in danger of being separated, as she was from a different town, so one week before they were to be transported to the internment camp they were married.

They were released from the camp in 1943 and moved to Chicago. A short time later he was drafted into the armed services. After the war and completion of his tour of duty, William completed his studies at Northwestern Medical School.

In 1963, Dr. Sato returned to South Pasadena with his wife and two sons. His son Bill majored in computer science and now works in Silicon Valley and son David became an M.D. and is a cardiologist who continues to live in South Pasadena with his own family.

As for Dr. Sato's parents, they returned to their flower shop and nursery and continued their business until the 1970's.

One of the last businesses before it became a museum was the

Meridian Iron Works. It was owned by Armand Grottolos, who was the son of a coal miner and he spent his early years in Canada. Later, while in Vancouver, B.C., he studied with a master craftsman from Italy and he learned the trade of blacksmith.

In 1967 he leased the building and continued to run the Meridian Iron Works, as other blacksmiths had done in the past. He was not just an ordinary blacksmith, he was the blacksmith to the stars. He did iron railing fencing for Frank Sinatra, window guards for Alfred Hitchcock and Cary Grant, and special gates for Olivia Newton John.

His accomplishments didn't stop there. His company was the first from South Pasadena to receive an award for outstanding excellence and craftsmanship from the Pasadena Institute of Architects. Grottolos retired at age 57 in 1980.

After the Cultural Heritage Commission restored the building in 1986, John Dewar was approached to help with an exhibit in the museum. A retired Curator of Western American Art in the Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History, he was a native of South Pasadena, born on Fremont Avenue on June 5, 1911. He shared his personal collection of family mementos, which today are still considered the museum's most prized artifacts.

Although he has moved to Patagonia, Arizona, we continue to call on him when ever we need any historical information. He is continuing with his historical research and is in the process of writing stories of his childhood in South Pasadena.

The Meridian Iron Works Museum has come full circle with South Pasadena as it stood in 1890 at the center of the community. Today again it is the center of activity on Thursdays at the Farmers Market. On opening day, it broke all records in attendance by having more than 400 people walk through the building. It is open on Saturday from 1 p.m. until 4 p.m. and Thursdays from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Maybe you can share a story with us on how the museum has intertwined with your life or with someone you know. ✦

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